

Shopping for healthy foods doesn’t need to be difficult

Q I would love to attend the Penny Pinchers Grocery Store Tours, but they haven’t fit with my schedule. Can you share some tips on how to shop for healthy foods on a budget? — **GG, Ayden**

A Please check with De’Vette Thomas (847-6497 or DMThomas@ecuhealth.org) for dates of tours sponsored by Pitt Partners in Health at different times and days throughout the county. The next tour is at 6 p.m. on May 22 at the Food Lion on Old Tar Road in Winterville. At the one-and-a-half-hour tour, you will listen, learn and ask questions in the store. Then you will shop using a gift card from Pitt Partners to buy \$15 of healthy food to take home. The food must meet the healthy guidelines discussed during the tour. There is no charge for attending.

In the meantime, fourth-year Brody medical student Alexis Moore and recent Brody graduate Dr. Michael Denning want to share these tips with you.

With rising grocery prices and so many food options, it’s easy to feel overwhelmed. With the right strategies, shopping for healthy food can be affordable — and even enjoyable. From smart planning and couponing to shopping methods and gardening, there are plenty of ways to stretch your money without sacrificing your health.

A nutritious diet starts with



KATHY KOLASA

understanding your daily food needs. The MyPlate guide (myplate.gov) is a great tool for building a balanced plate. Adults should aim for 1.5 to 2.5 cups of fruit each day. This includes fresh, frozen or canned fruit without added sugar, half a cup of dried fruit or a cup of 100%

fruit juice. Vegetables are equally important with a daily goal of 2 to 4 cups. That might include 1 cup of raw or cooked vegetables, or 2 cups of leafy greens without added seasonings.

Protein should make up 5 to 7 ounces per day. This could include lean meats, poultry, fish, beans or eggs. For example, 1 ounce of meat, a quarter cup of cooked beans or one egg each counts as one ounce. For dairy, adults need about 3 cups per day — milk, yogurt, soy milk or cheese are great sources. Lastly, whole grains should make up 3.5 to 5 ounces of your daily intake, with options like whole grain bread, brown rice, oatmeal and pasta. Keeping these portions in mind while shopping helps you buy exactly what you need without going over budget.

Couponing can be a smart way to save, especially when paired with store loyalty programs. Many grocery chains have digital or paper coupons available through rewards systems. Locally we have Harris Teeter’s VIC, Food Lion’s MVP or Lowes Foods’ Fresh Rewards. These can offer discounts on fresh produce,



FILE PHOTO/THE DAILY REFLECTOR

A Penny Pinchers Healthy Grocery Store Tour will be held at 6 p.m. May 22 at the Food Lion at 4822 Old Tar Road, Winterville. From smart planning and couponing to shopping methods and gardening, there are plenty of ways to stretch your money without sacrificing your health.

dairy and pantry staples. They are also easily accessible via apps on your phone or by coupon booklets in the store. Remember that coupons are most helpful when used for items already on your shopping list, not for things you weren’t planning to buy.

Budgeting is another essential piece of the puzzle. The USDA recommends starting with a weekly meal plan. Map out your meals, check what ingredients you already have at home and plan to use leftovers to cut waste and costs. Create a detailed shopping list. Keeping this list on your fridge or in a phone app makes it easy to add items throughout the week.

Buying in bulk is a great way

to save money. Use the unit price to make sure it’s a deal. Shelf-stable items like dry beans, lentils, rice, pasta, canned meats (like tuna or chicken) and frozen fruits and vegetables are affordable, long-lasting and easy to use in a variety of meals. Stock up on healthy fats like olive or canola oil. You might find the foods you usually buy are less expensive at Walmart or the discount grocery stores like ALDI, Lidl, Tropicalana or Piggly Wiggly. Check the prices online before you shop.

One way to be sure you buy healthy food is to read the Nutrition Facts label. If you are shopping at a Food Lion, you can use their Guiding Stars to quickly identify the healthier items. A

cereal with three stars on the Food Lion brand box or on the shelf talker means the food is healthy, while one with two stars is not quite as healthy as one with three stars — and if there are no stars, there is a better choice to make.

A few more tips: Avoid shopping when you’re hungry to avoid impulse buys. Buy generic brands and try to include a mix of fresh, frozen and canned items. When buying fresh produce, buy in season. Seasonal fruits and vegetables may be cheaper and taste better. You can freeze or can extras for later.

The way you move through the store matters. The American Heart Association recommends starting with the outer aisles, where fresh produce, dairy, meats and seafood are usually stocked. That tip doesn’t always work. In our local markets, you might find expensive, trendy foods in those aisles. Processed snacks and sugary items are often placed near check-out lanes. Buy only what’s on your list unless you find a sale on foods you use often. Shopping alone, when possible, may also help you stay focused and stick to your list.

Shopping for healthy food on a budget isn’t about sacrificing quality; it’s about being intentional and creative.

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Nine states now report measles outbreaks; nation up to 800 cases

DEVI SHASTRI
Associated Press

Montana is now the ninth U.S. state to have an active measles outbreak, and the U.S. was up to 800 cases of measles nationwide as of Friday.

Texas is driving the high numbers, with an outbreak centered in West Texas that started nearly three months ago and is up to 597 cases.

Two unvaccinated elementary school-aged children died from measles-related illnesses near the epicenter in Texas, and an adult in New Mexico who was not vaccinated died of a measles-related illness.

Other states with active outbreaks — defined as three or more cases — include Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Oklahoma, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New Mexico. The U.S. has more than double the number of measles cases it saw in all of 2024.

Measles is caused by a highly contagious virus that’s airborne and spreads easily when an infected person breathes, sneezes or coughs. It is preventable through vaccines, and has been considered eliminated from the U.S. since 2000.

Health experts fear the virus will take hold in other U.S. communities with low vaccination rates and that the spread could stretch on for a year.

In North America, an outbreak in Ontario, Canada has sickened 925 from mid-October through April 16. That’s on top of cases in Mexico that the World Health Organization has said are linked to the Texas outbreak.

A large outbreak in Chihuahua state has 433 cases as of April 18, according to data from the state health ministry.

TEXAS AND NEW MEXICO

Texas state health officials said Friday there were 36 new cases of measles since Tuesday, bringing the total to 597 across 25 counties — most of them in West Texas. Four more Texans were hospitalized, for a total of 62 throughout the outbreak, and Parmer



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., left, arrives at Reinlander Mennonite Church after a second measles death on April 6 in Seminole, Texas.

and Potter counties logger their first cases.

State health officials estimated about 4% of cases — fewer than 30 — are actively infectious.

Sixty-two percent of Texas’ cases are in Gaines County, population 22,892, where the virus started spreading in a close-knit, undervaccinated Mennonite community. The county has logged 371 cases since late January — just over 1% of the county’s residents.

The April 3 death in Texas was an 8-year-old child, according to Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Health officials in Texas said the child did not have underlying health conditions and died of “what the child’s doctor described as measles pulmonary failure.” A unvaccinated child with no underlying conditions died of measles in Texas in late February — Kennedy said age 6.

New Mexico announced five new cases last week, bringing the state’s total to 63. Three more people were in the hospital last week, for a total of six since the outbreak started. Most of the state’s cases are in Lea County. Two are in Eddy County and Chaves and Doña Ana counties have one each.

State health officials say the cases are linked to Texas’ outbreak based on genetic testing. New Mexico reported its first measles-related death in an adult on March 6.

SEVEN MORE OUTBREAKS

■ Kansas has 37 cases

in eight counties in the southwest part of the state, health officials announced last week.

Finney, Ford, Grant, Gray and Morton counties have fewer than five cases each. Haskell County has the most with eight cases, Stevens County has seven, Kiowa County has six.

The state’s first reported case, identified in Stevens County on March 13, is linked to the Texas and New Mexico outbreaks based on genetic testing, a state health department spokesperson said. But health officials have not determined how the person was exposed.

■ Cases in Oklahoma remained steady at 12 total cases Friday: nine confirmed and three probable. The first two probable cases were “associated” with the West Texas and New Mexico outbreaks, the state health department said.

A state health department spokesperson said measles exposures were confirmed in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, Rogers and Custer counties, but wouldn’t say which counties had cases.

■ The Ohio Department of Health confirmed 30 measles cases in the state Thursday. The state county includes only Ohio residents.

There are 14 cases in Ashtabula County near Cleveland, 14 in Knox County and one each in Allen and Holmes counties, the state said. The outbreak in Ashtabula County started with an unvaccinated adult who had

interacted with someone who had traveled internationally.

Health officials in Knox County, in east-central Ohio, say there are a total of 20 people with measles, but seven of them do not live in Ohio. In 2022, a measles outbreak in central Ohio sickened 85.

■ Indiana confirmed two more cases Monday in an outbreak that has sickened eight in Allen County in the northeast part of the state — five are unvaccinated minors and three are adults whose vaccination status is unknown. The cases have no known link to other outbreaks, the Allen County Department of Health said Monday.

■ In far northwest Pennsylvania, Erie County health officials declared a measles outbreak Monday after finding two new cases linked to a measles case confirmed March 30.

The state has had nine cases overall this year, six of which are not linked to the outbreak, including international travel-related cases in Montgomery County and one in Philadelphia.

■ Montcalm County, near Grand Rapids in western Michigan, has three linked measles cases. State health officials say the cases are tied to a large measles outbreak in Ontario, Canada. The state had seven confirmed measles cases as of Thursday, but the remaining four are not part of the Montcalm County outbreak. Michigan’s last measles outbreak was in 2019.

■ Montana state health officials announced five cases Thursday in unvaccinated children and adults who had traveled out of state, and confirmed it was an outbreak on Monday. All five are isolating at home in Gallatin County in the southwest part of the state.

State health officials are working to trace exposures in Bozeman and Belgrade. They are Montana’s first measles cases in 35 years. Health officials didn’t say whether the cases are linked to other outbreaks in

North America.

Measles cases also have been reported in Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont and Washington.

Cases and outbreaks in the U.S. are frequently traced to someone who caught the disease abroad. In 2019, the U.S. saw 1,274 cases and almost lost its status of having eliminated measles.

MMR VACCINE

The best way to avoid measles is to get the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine. The first shot is recommended for children between 12 and 15 months old and the second between 4 and 6 years old.

Getting another MMR shot is harmless if there are concerns about waning immunity, the CDC says. People who have documentation of receiving a live measles vaccine in the 1960s don’t need to be revaccinated, but people who were immunized before 1968 with an ineffective measles vaccine made from “killed” virus should be revaccinated with at least one dose, the agency said.

People who have documentation that they had measles are immune and those born before 1957 generally don’t need the

shots because most children back then had measles and now have “presumptive immunity.”

In communities with high vaccination rates — above 95% — diseases like measles have a harder time spreading through communities. This is called “herd immunity.”

But childhood vaccination rates have declined nationwide since the pandemic and more parents are claiming religious or personal conscience waivers to exempt their kids from required shots. The U.S. saw a rise in measles cases in 2024, including an outbreak in Chicago that sickened more than 60.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Measles first infects the respiratory tract, then spreads throughout the body, causing a high fever, runny nose, cough, red, watery eyes and a rash.

The rash generally appears three to five days after the first symptoms, beginning as flat red spots on the face and then spreading downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs and feet. When the rash appears, the fever may spike over 104 degrees Fahrenheit, according to the CDC.

Most kids will recover from measles, but infection can lead to dangerous complications such as pneumonia, blindness, brain swelling and death.



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